

Benchmark Committee

Meeting Summary

March 13, 2000

Adopted (4/28/2000)

Committee members present: Chair Bob Helsell, John Kelly, John Rindlaub, Charlie Shell (representing Councilmember Richard McIver), Karen Schmidt, Commissioner Judie Stanton

Committee members not present: Greg Devereux

Other Commissioners present: Peter Hurley

The Benchmark Committee convened at 9:00 am at the SeaTac Holiday Inn. Chair Bob Helsell called the meeting to order and welcomed Karen Schmidt back as a returning member of the Commission. The meeting summary of January 12, 2000 was adopted. No members of the public offered comments.

Proposed Benchmark Formats

Two proposed benchmarks were presented, one an indicator of freight movement, the other a benchmark on seismic safety.

Freight mobility and trade competitiveness. A graph of container cargo-related rail and truck traffic was presented, similar to the one agreed upon by the committee members at the last meeting. Kathy Elias noted that it represented just a snapshot, not a comprehensive picture of freight mobility, and that it was being proposed as an indicator, not as a benchmark. It was noted that due to the growth of e-commerce there was a strong increase in domestic shipping by air, by rail and by truck. Members wondered whether there were additional data sources on air cargo or truck and barge tonnage, to augment the snapshot of trade-related container cargo data. A member noted that WSDOT had gathered data on truck tonnage to define the strategic freight corridors. Staff agreed to research the additional data.

Seismic safety of bridges. A handout graph showed the number and cost of the remaining seismic retrofits with a proposed target that all Level 1 and 2 bridges would be retrofitted by 2020, including the Alaskan Way Viaduct. In terms of cost, the Viaduct was the single largest cost item at about \$350 million and currently not programmed. A member asked that the cost of the Viaduct be broken out and

shown separately. Transportation Commissioner Aubrey Davis noted that in each of the last three legislative sessions, a request for \$500,000 to study the Viaduct had been turned down.

Available State and National Data for Benchmarking

Members proceeded to discuss the handouts provided by staff on the following topic areas:

Mobility options. Two graphs showed the non-auto share of work trips, one including carpools and the other including only transit, ferry, walking and bicycling. Without carpooling, the share of non-auto work trips had been around 40% in the Seattle CBD and in the University District in 1980 and had declined to the 35-37% range in 1990. With carpooling, the percentages are about 10 points higher. But the trend in all five locations is toward a declining share of non-auto trips. Members discussed the reasons for this trend and pointed out such factors as the prosperous economic times, the low gas prices during the 90s, the trend toward dual income working couples and just general growth in the region.

Kathy reported that she had obtained the available traffic volume data on HOV and general purpose lanes from the Puget Sound Regional Council. Unfortunately, it had only started to be collected in 1995 and had been collected for most locations for the first time in 1997, so was insufficient to establish trend lines useful for benchmarking. Additionally, it was measured at specific locations and differed widely depending on the location, so could not easily be aggregated into systemwide totals.

It was suggested that an additional data source might be the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) office at WSDOT for data on the effectiveness of CTR programs in increasing the non-auto mode share. Kathy said she would research the data and bring samples to the next meeting.

Cost Efficiency – Transit Operations. Two graphs showed comparisons of Washington transit agencies with other comparably sized metropolitan areas around the country. They indicated that operating costs per rider are higher on average in Washington than elsewhere. A number of reasons were mentioned that contribute to this, including congestion which causes buses to travel more slowly, labor costs in Washington, and the service areas which in many cases are countywide in Washington whereas they are just the urban area in other regions. It was noted that following passage of I-695, the operating costs will certainly drop sharply unless funds can be restored. A member said that in any case a benchmark should seek to have a downward trending cost per passenger. It was asked that figures be compiled for transit riders per capita in the other metro areas for comparison purposes.

Cost Efficiency – Highway Administration. Three graphs were presented. The first compared the growth in administrative and other costs in Washington and nationally and compared these to the CPI. Washington's costs increased over 100% in 10 years while inflation grew 30% over the same period. It was noted that these figures are reported to the federal Highway Statistics program and include non-WSDOT costs such as Department of Licensing collection costs and state services such as General Administration and Attorney General. WSDOT staff had indicated they would prefer showing and measuring growth over time in administrative costs rather than percent of total, since the latter could

vary widely depending on the size of the budget in any given year and did not truly reflect changes in overhead costs.

The committee asked to see staffing numbers by administrative function within WSDOT.

The second graph showed administration spending per mile of state highways and indicated that Washington's costs were about one-third higher than the national mean. The third graph was provided in response to committee questions about construction costs per lane mile. WSDOT staff had surveyed Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming and provided a comparison with Washington that showed Oregon and Idaho had higher costs and Wyoming had lower costs for the period examined. However, it would vary widely depending on what projects were being built in a given year.

The committee agreed to meet again in April and asked staff to check with members to schedule the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.